

Section II

General Park Background / Trends / Public Process Findings

Overview

This section of the master plan considers the general background of the park reserve, regional trends affecting its future use, and findings from the public process. Considered collectively, these variables played a major role in shaping the master plan and how the decisions made today will affect the park 10, 20, or even 50 years hence.

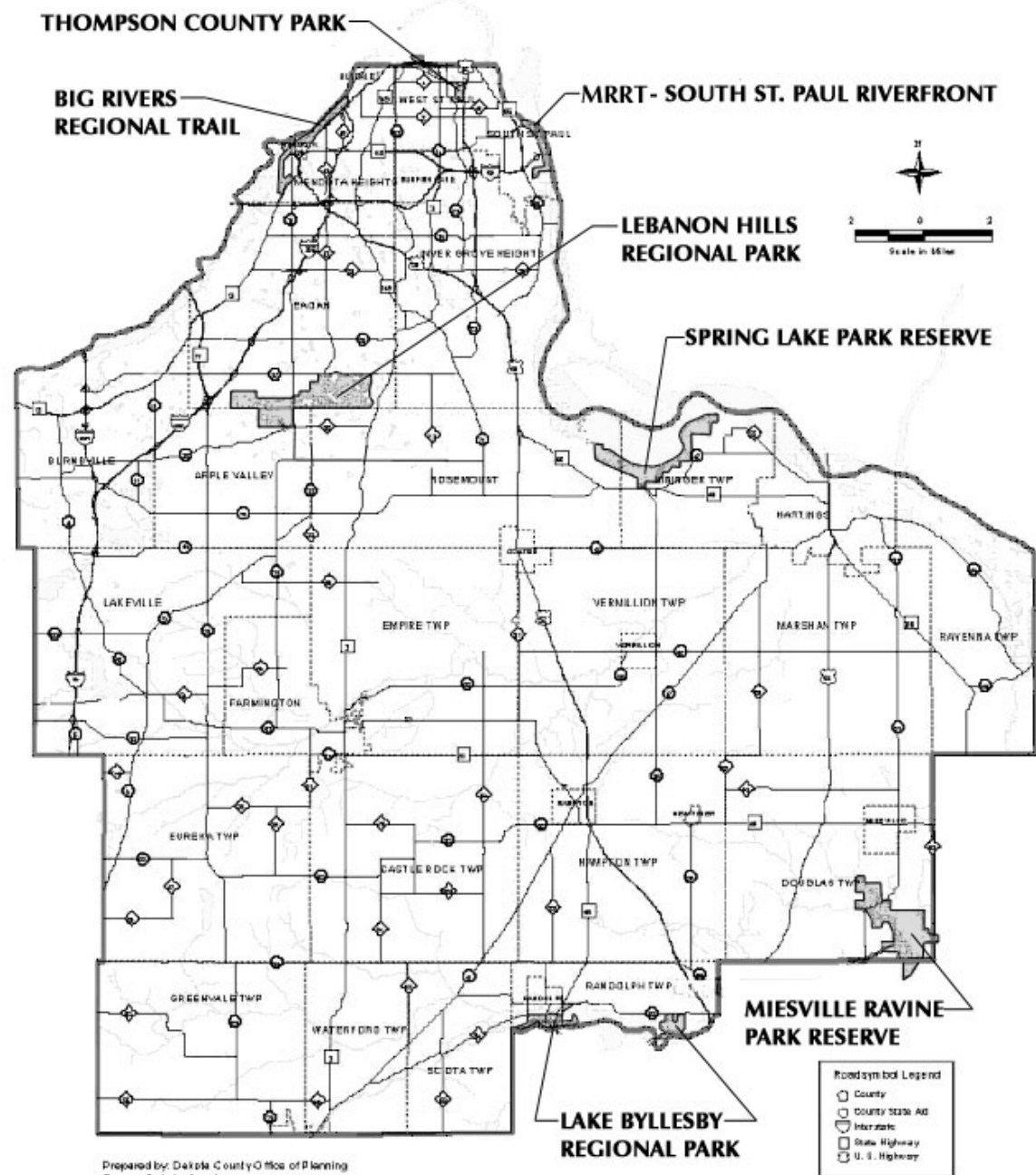
Regional Park Context

Spring Lake Park Reserve was first proposed as a County park in the 1970 *Dakota County Parks and Recreational Facilities Plan*. Acquisition of park property began in 1972. In 1975, the State Legislature passed the Metropolitan Parks Act that established the Regional Park System. At around that time, Spring Lake Park Reserve was given regional designation.

In 1980 the boundaries of the park were revised as part of the *Dakota County Long-Range Comprehensive Plan*. Under the 1983 master plan for the park, additional adjustments were made to the boundaries. There are no proposed changes to the park boundaries under this master plan.

As an implementing agency for the regional park system, Dakota County has the responsibility to develop and implement plans for property acquisition and development of all of the regional parks, park reserves and trails within the county. Dakota County operates and maintains five major park units and one major trail unit. The agency oversees over 4,395 acres of acquired park land throughout the County. There are also about 1,191 acres yet to acquire. At around 1,200 acres, Spring Lake Park Reserve is not the largest park within the county. It does, however, exhibit ecological, cultural, and scenic assets that make it one of the most unique parks within the regional park system. Figure 2.1 illustrates the location of the park relative to the other parks within Dakota County.

Figure 2.1 – Location of Spring Lake Park within Dakota County.



Interrelationship with Other Regional Parks within Dakota County

Within the regional context, Spring Lake Park Reserve interrelates with a number of other regional parks and trails within Dakota County, as identified in figure 2.1 on the previous page. Parks within the regional system include the following.

Big Rivers Regional Trail: Located in northwestern Dakota County, the trail runs between high limestone bluffs and scenic river valleys, with views of the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. This four-mile paved trail is built on the rail bed of the Minnesota Central Railroad – one of Minnesota's oldest railroads. The trailhead overlooks Fort Snelling, the state's first military outpost, and Pike Island, site of treaty negotiations with the Sioux Indians and now a designated National Historic Landmark. Just off the trail in the City of Mendota, the home Henry H. Sibley, Minnesota's first governor, is open to the public during the summer months.

Lebanon Hills Regional Park: Located on over 2,000 acres of naturally preserved parkland in Egan and Apple Valley, Lebanon Hills Regional Park offers year-round recreation opportunities. Lakes, marshes, woodlands, and meadows create an escape for summer hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, camping, swimming, and more. The park includes an extensive trail system winding through hilly terrain and connecting the various recreation areas. Trails are groomed in winter for classical cross-country skiing, ski skating, and winter hiking. The new Lebanon Hills Regional Park Visitor Center/Trailhead was recently built with state-of-the-art design using sustainable materials and practices.

Lake Byllesby Regional Park: Located near Cannon Falls. The largest lake in Dakota County, the Lake Byllesby Reservoir offers power boating, sailing, wind surfing, fishing and swimming. Other park activities include picnicking, hiking, RV and tent camping, and biking on the nearby Cannon Valley Trail. Wintertime activities include ice fishing, dogsledding, skijoring and the annual Cabin Fever Festival and Cannon Valley Dog Sled Races.

Miesville Ravine Park Reserve: Located on 1,300 acres in the Cannon River Valley in southeastern Dakota County, Miesville Ravine Park Reserve offers scenic vistas from the bluff tops to the shorelines of the Cannon River and Trout Brook. The park is wooded with mature oak, maple, cottonwood, willow, and red cedar trees, and includes one of the last remaining natural stands of white pine in the Cannon River Valley. The park is home to a diversity of wildlife and Trout Brook is a state designated trout stream. Activities include picnicking, year-round hiking, and snowshoeing amid a near-wilderness setting.

County Parks: Dakota County also has one county park not in the regional system. **Thompson County Park**, located in West St. Paul, serves as a neighborhood and community park. Trails bring visitors through groves of large oak trees and around Thompson Lake. Trails also are groomed for winter skiing. The Thompson Park Center-Dakota Lodge provides space for large gatherings, with an atrium, fireplace, and full kitchen.

The functional interrelationship between Spring Lake Regional Park Reserve and these other regional amenities was considered during the master planning process to ensure that each park unit complements the other. The *Dakota County Parks Plan* (2002) should be referred to for more detailed information on the development features of these other parks and trails.

Other Regional and State Parks and Recreational Facilities Near Eastern Dakota County

In addition to the parks and trails within Dakota County, a number of other state and regional parks are in the general vicinity of Spring Lake Park Reserve and were considered as part of the planning process. Spring Lake Park Reserve complements these parks.

St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park (Washington County): Located south of Afton on the St. Croix River, the park offers rolling hills, blufftop forests, and 3,800 feet of scenic river shoreline. Activities include camping, picnicking, boating, hiking, and skiing.

Cottage Grove Ravine (Washington County): Located in the City of Cottage Grove, the park is a natural wooded ravine with elevation changes of over 150 feet with prairie remnants and large wetland wildlife habitat areas. Activities include picnicking, hiking, and cross-country skiing. Camping is planned for the future.

Grey Cloud Island (Washington County): Located in the Mississippi River bend near Cottage Grove, the park landscape consists of river valley and floodplain forest. The island currently hosts aggregate mining and park development plans will be implemented as mining is phased out. The park master plan proposes future camping, picnicking, bicycle and hiking trails, boat launches, and an interpretive area.

Afton State Park (Washington County): Is set in rolling glacial moraine and bluff lands, with oak openings, upland hardwoods, and some pine plantations. Remnant prairies are being expanded and oak savannas are being restored. The park is cut by deep ravines that drop three hundred feet to the river, showing dramatic sandstone outcrops. The rugged terrain affords spectacular views of the St. Croix River. The park has 20 miles of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding; backpack campsites, a swimming beach, and a visitor's center with interpretive displays.

Cannon Valley Trail: Runs through diverse and spectacular scenery on a former Chicago Great Western Railroad line, connecting the cities of Cannon Falls, Welch, and Red Wing. It is a multiple use trail offering hiking, biking, in-line skating, and cross-country skiing. Paralleling the Cannon River, the trail offers glimpses and panoramas of the valley and descends 115 feet in elevation from Cannon Falls to Red Wing. Future trail connections to Dakota County's Lake Byllesby Regional Park and Miesville Ravine Park Reserve are possible.

Regional Trends Forecasting

Trends related to population growth and characteristics, along with evolving recreational trends, influenced the master plan for Spring Lake Park Reserve in meeting the cultural needs of the regional community. As defined by the Metropolitan Council, a variety of trends are expected to impact the use of the regional park system over the next twenty and fifty years. The following considers the trends that most influenced the master plan outcomes for Spring Lake Park Reserve.

Population Trends for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and Dakota County

One of the more important trends is that the population in the metropolitan area is expected to continue to grow. As shown in the table in figure 2.3, the population forecast, as stratified by regional park agency jurisdiction, reveals that the population in Dakota County is expected to show the greatest overall increase in numbers.

Figure 2.3 – Population forecasts stratified by regional park agency jurisdiction. (Source: Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System)

County/City	Preliminary Population estimates			Total increase from 2000		% increase from 2000	
	2000	2020	2050	2020	2050	2020	2050
Dakota County	351,240	456,160	579,436	104,920	228,196	30%	65%
Suburban Henn County	646,550	737,480	837,189	90,930	190,639	14%	29%
Washington County	203,120	288,670	377,082	85,550	173,962	42%	86%
Anoka County	295,910	350,410	440,575	54,500	144,665	18%	49%
Scott County	81,990	137,910	187,452	55,920	105,462	68%	129%
Carver County	66,160	104,420	145,144	38,260	78,984	58%	119%
Suburban Ramsey Co.	231,020	243,340	263,916	12,320	32,896	5%	14%
St. Paul	274,500	294,000	301,723	19,500	27,223	7%	10%
Minneapolis	370,000	388,000	392,656	18,000	22,656	5%	6%
Bloomington	88,500	91,000	92,978	2,500	4,478	3%	5%
Total	2,608,990	3,091,390	3,618,151	482,400	1,009,162	18%	39%

Note: Suburban Hennepin County does not include Bloomington or Minneapolis

Note: Suburban Ramsey County does not include St. Paul

Figure 2.4 – Change in population in Dakota County.

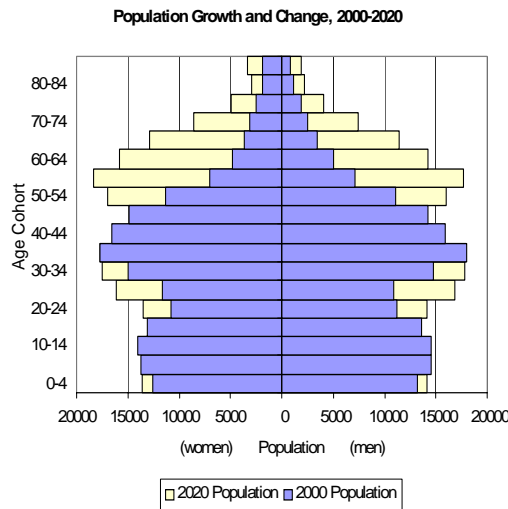
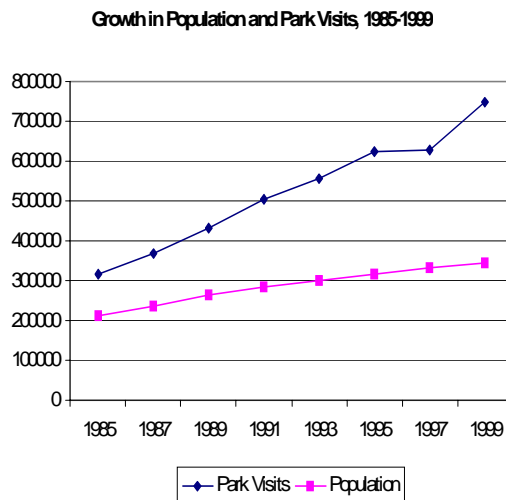


Figure 2.5 – Graphic illustrates the steepening rate of growth in park visits relative to population.



Another important consideration is the changing dynamic of the growing population. As defined in the *Dakota County Parks Plan*, the population in the county is expected to:

- ▶ Continue to grow, although at a slower pace than the last several decades.
- ▶ Change its “shape” (as shown in figure 2.4). The shape of the 2020 population represents a more mature community, with a greater balance across all age groups. In nearly all age groups, there will be more residents in Dakota County in 2020 than today. This change is especially significant for those age groups of 50-54 years and above.
- ▶ Be older, on average, in 2020 than it is today. The number of residents 55 years and older will increase from 47,040 in 2000 to 125,600 in 2020 – an increase of over 150%. These are the baby boomers moving into retirement. This group will account for 28% of all residents of the County by 2020.
- ▶ Maintain a strong base of young families with children in Dakota County. There will be nearly the same number of residents 15 years and younger in the County in 2020 as there are today – 82,560 in 2000 verses 82,050 in 2020. However, this group will represent a smaller percentage (24% verses 18%) of the total population in 2020.

As also defined in the Parks Plan, studies show that older people are more active than in previous generations and are staying active in their later years. This is especially the case with activities such as walking, hiking, bicycling, and nature observation. With better health and greater affluence than previous generations, the baby boomers are anticipated to continue to participate in outdoor recreation in high numbers.

In summary, Dakota County’s population will increase and become more age-diverse, with a wider distribution of people among the age groups. This trend will put increasingly more pressure on Spring Lake Park Reserve to service a wider range of outdoor recreation needs. In addition, changing public needs will require the park to be adaptable over time.

Trends in Park Visits

With an increasing population comes an increase in the number of park visits. As defined in the Parks Plan, trends in park visits include:

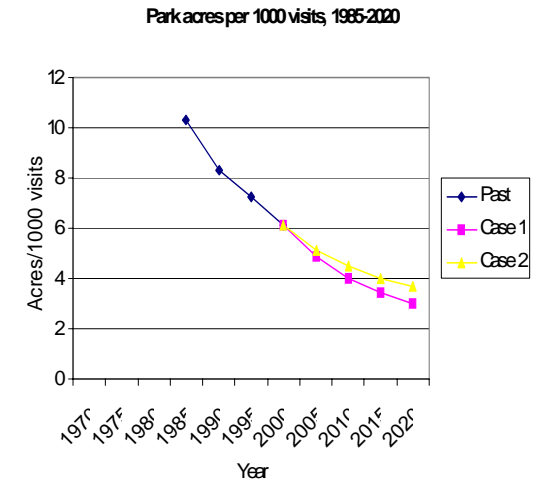
- ▶ Faster growth in park visits in Dakota County than population over the last fifteen years. Dakota County experienced rapid population growth throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but visits to its park system actually grew three times as fast. The figure at left illustrates the widening gap between visits and population.
- ▶ In 1999, the Metropolitan Council estimated 749,600 visits to Dakota County’s regional parks, park reserves, and regional trails. Dakota County’s estimated population in 1999 was 345,248.
- ▶ People are also using the park system more often – participation in recreation and leisure activities is increasing nationally and locally. This results in higher annual visits.
- ▶ Dakota County is also attracting more people from outside the County. This number is currently small, but is expected to increase as the County continues to add or improve facilities.

When looking further into future park visit trends, the numbers become even more telling as to the demands that will be placed on regional park resources. Figure 2.6 provides a rough estimate in the number of visits to the regional system for 2020 and 2050, as projected by the Metropolitan Council.

Figure 2.6 – Trends in overall park visits to the regional park system. (Source: Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System)

	1999 Visits (1,000's)	2020 Visits (1,000's)	2050 Visits (1,000's)	2020 % increase	2050 % increase
Scott	187	249	308	33%	65%
Carver	175	225	280	29%	60%
Washington	586	743	908	27%	55%
Dakota	750	925	1,128	23%	50%
Anoka	1,843	2,165	2,610	17%	42%
Hennepin	3,235	3,715	4,240	15%	31%
Ramsey	1,577	1,771	2,004	12%	27%
Bloomington	807	902	1,003	12%	24%
St. Paul	4,588	5,136	5,665	12%	23%
Minneapolis	15,525	16,903	17,994	9%	16%
TOTAL	29,273	32,733	36,140	12%	23%

Figure 2.7 – Trends in park acres per 1000 visits, 1985 - 2020. (Source: Dakota County Park System Plan.)



With an increase in visits come a propensity for crowding relative to current and past experiences. As figure 2.7 illustrates, there will simply be fewer acres available per person visit than there are today. The challenge will be to spread that use out across the park system to avoid a concentration of visitors in one park and to continue to provide for the quiet appreciation of natural settings. Also, it will be necessary to increase the capacity of some facilities to accommodate increased public demand.

Trends in Recreational Demands

Through review of a variety of studies completed by the Metropolitan Council and the Dakota County Parks Department, along with other sources, much was learned about the recreational trends influencing decisions about Spring Lake Park Reserve's future development. The following provides an overview of these findings.

At the regional level, research suggests that there is a trend toward increased participation in most types of outdoor activities out to 2050. As the table on the following page illustrates, walking and hiking will continue to maintain very high participation levels.

Figure 2.8 – Trends in overall park visits to the regional park system. (Source: Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System)

Activity	Base ¹ (1,000's)	Projected change for 2020 (%)	Projected change for 2050 (%)	Projected visits for 2020 (1,000's)	Projected Visits for 2050 (1,000's)
Walking/hiking	9,548	23%	48%	11,744	14,131
Biking	5,482	18%	54%	6,469	8,442
Non-pool swimming	4,280	12%	37%	4,794	5,864
Picnicking	3,240	16%	23%	3,759	3,985
Sightseeing	1,020	34%	76%	1,367	1,795
Fishing	1,160	11%	15%	1,288	1,334
Motorboating	540	7%	20%	578	648
Nonconsumptive wildlife activities	360	40%	72%	504	619
nonmotorized boating	300	33%	78%	399	534
Developed camping	280	19%	32%	333	369
Family gathering	220	14%	33%	251	293
Cross-country skiing	217	-1%	18%	215	256
Horseback riding	60	27%	100%	76	120
Snowmobiling	N/A	42%	121%	N/A	N/A
Visiting historic places	N/A	39%	76%	N/A	N/A
Visiting a beach or waterslide	N/A	14%	35%	N/A	N/A
Hiking	N/A	12%	24%	N/A	N/A
Backpacking	N/A	-2%	10%	N/A	N/A
primitive camping	N/A	-4%	-20%	N/A	N/A
Metro Population increase	N/A	18%	39%	N/A	N/A
Total	26,707	19%	44%	31,775.5	38,391.3

¹ Base number of visits were determined using the Metropolitan Council's 1999 Annual Use Estimate and 1998/99 Regional Parks Visitor Study. It was not possible to determine the base visits for 1999 for those activities labeled "N/A". For some activities such as "hiking" and "visiting a beach or waterslide", they are partially subsets of broader activity categories ("walking" and "nonpool swimming").

Spring Lake Park will accommodate 14 out of the 19 activities listed. Results from a 1998 University of Minnesota Leisure Survey, Dakota County Subset, provides additional information on recreation trends and citizens perspectives within the county, as summarized in the following table.

Recreation Facility Needs Expressed by Dakota County Residents

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) Nature areas (41%) | 7) Snowmobile trails (24%) |
| 2) Fishing docks (40%) | 8) Downhill ski areas (23%) |
| 3) Nature Centers (39%) | 9) Ski trails and picnic areas (22% each) |
| 4) Campgrounds (37%) | 10) Golf courses (11%) |
| 5) Beaches (35%) | |
| 6) Bike paths, inline skating paths, and hiking trails (34% each) | |

Popularity of Outdoor Activities among Dakota County Residents

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Visiting zoos (89%) | 19) Other team sports (soccer, softball, etc.) (33%) |
| 2) Walking in natural areas, large parks (79%) | 20) Inline skating, roller-skating, skateboarding (27%) |
| 3) Picnicking (78%) | 21) Jogging (26%) |
| 4) Visiting arboretums, public gardens (68%) | 22) Biking on unpaved trails in natural areas, large parks (25%) |
| 5) Fishing (63%) | 23) Horseback riding (24%) |
| 6) Casual sports (frisbee, catch, etc.) (62%) | 24) Hunting (23%) |
| 7) Camping (60%) | 25) Shooting sports (skeet, archery , etc.) (23%) |
| 8) Swimming/sunbathing at beach (55%) | 26) Snowmobiling (22%) |
| 9) Visiting outdoor playgrounds (54%) | 27) Downhill skiing (22%) |
| 10) Biking 3 miles or less (47%) | 28) Riding all-terrain vehicles (21%) |
| 11) Swimming/sunbathing at pool (46%) | 29) Racquet sports (tennis, squash, racquetball, etc.) (21%) |
| 12) Power boating, water-skiing, jet skiing (45%) | 30) Ice skating (19%) |
| 13) Non-power boating (45%) | 31) Road biking (19%) |
| 14) Biking on paved trails in natural areas, large parks (44%) | 32) Cross-country skiing (19%) |
| 15) Informal birding, nature study (42%) | 33) Adventure sports (skydiving, rock climbing, etc.) (14%) |
| 16) Sledding, tobogganing (40%) | 34) Ice hockey (12%) |
| 17) Golf (38%) | 35) Formal birding, nature study (11%) |
| 18) Animal training (35%) | |

Bolded items are those that will be accommodated in Spring Lake Park, to varying degrees.

As the table illustrates, Spring Lake Park Reserve will accommodate many of the most popular activities cited by Dakota County residents.

In a separate Dakota County survey, it was also found that a high percentage of residents use the regional parks (72%) and that they rate the quality of the parks as good (59%).

Other Regional Trends of Note

A number of other notable regional trends add insight into the long-term prospects for Spring Lake Park Reserve in terms of user base and challenges. As defined in the *Metropolitan Council System Analysis of the Regional Recreation Open Space System* study, these include:

- ▶ Current lower than expected use of the regional park system by teens and young adults will be reflected in lowered future use of the regional park system by these groups. Leisure research has shown that recreation habits are formed as children and teenagers. What this means is that if teens and young adults are currently not using the regional park system, it is probable that they will continue through their adult life to not use the regional system. Education at an early age about the values that regional parks can bring to one's life will be important to changing this trend.
- ▶ The baby boom generation will continue to have a large presence in the regional park system, but their needs will change. The baby boom generation is currently using the regional park system at rates that are higher than their actual share of the metropolitan area population. Visitation by people over the age of 60 is expected to increase as the baby boom generation ages and continues their use of the regional park system. Facilities will need to be kept up to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, and more opportunities for low impact and educational learning opportunities should be provided to meet the needs of this growing user base.
- ▶ The regional park system will see the effects of an increase in population neutralized to a large degree by a major segment of the population that has not developed a leisure routine that includes visiting regional parks. This is a result of the current under-use by teens and young adults, who will also be less likely to take their children to regional parks, which could develop a downward trend in visitation over multiple generations. The Council and implementing agencies are aware of this issue and will be working on assessing potential barriers to participation and identifying ways to increase visitation to the regional park system by these age groups.
- ▶ Facilities in regional parks need to be assessed to ensure they help meet the needs of the growing ethnically-diverse segments of the population.
- ▶ Demand for mini-vacation opportunities in the local area will increase. Camping in regional parks may become more popular among local residents. Expect increased interest and markets for packages that combine camping with resource education programs or specific organized activity events such as bird banding, astronomy, walking or adventure recreation.
- ▶ Increasing oil prices may decrease automobile fuel consumption and long auto-trips to national or state parks may decrease in frequency. As such, demand for local recreation opportunities that involve less travel will increase, as will non-automobile access to regional park system units.
- ▶ Over the next ten years, the number of recreational vehicles (RVs) and proportion of households with an RV should rise moderately, to 3.1 % of all households. Regional park units will be challenged with the pressure to develop more RV-oriented sites while trying to meet the needs and desires of local residents.

Park Management Trends

As defined by the Metropolitan Council, *"a new paradigm is emerging in the regional park system that focuses on the benefits obtained from visiting parks. This new approach focuses on providing quality benefits to individuals, social/community benefits, economic benefits and environmental benefits."* As stated by the Council, this approach takes on a more holistic attitude than previous management approaches.

Under this approach, the Metropolitan Council study makes the following points:

- ▶ The regional park system needs to have a stronger focus on identifying and quantifying the benefits provided by the system.
- ▶ Community and environmental benefits and costs will play an increasingly important role in decisions made about planning, managing and funding the regional park system.
- ▶ Quantifying the economic benefits of regional parks will strengthen the ability of the system to compete for funding and will allow for inclusion of parks in the economic models used in making decisions that affect the region.

Winter Use Study Findings

In 1999, the Metropolitan Council conducted a study of winter users in regional parks. Whereas the study has its limitations in that it focused on winter users, it does reveal some telling points that are reflective of recurring themes from the public meetings that were held. Study highlights include the following:

- ▶ Setting, views, and the opportunity to experience nature were highest rated reasons for visiting the park.
- ▶ The fact that the park provides the feeling of solitude and privacy and appealing winter trails is a major reason why users are coming here versus going somewhere else.
- ▶ From a winter users perspective, the need for a warming house, rental equipment, and other support is not very important.
- ▶ Satisfaction with the facilities is very high, with 98% of those surveyed expressing this opinion.

Although the survey group is rather limited and does not account for all potential winter users, it is a confirmation of the key values that are so prevalent with this park — maintain the natural experience and sense of place.

Findings from the Public Process

The public process was structured to allow all interested parties ample opportunity to participate in the planning process. In addition to formal meetings with the Dakota County Parks and Recreation Commission, Board of Commissioners, and staff, an extensive number of other public meetings were held to give the public-at-large the chance to voice their opinions and critique planning and design ideas. In addition, a couple of day-long planning charrettes were held to involve a wide variety of public agencies and non-profit groups in the planning process. The following summarizes the formal public meetings.

Public Meetings for the Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan

2/05/03	PARAC – Presentation on SLPR planning process
3/11/03	Focus Meeting for Youth Groups, Seniors, Past Event-Holders
3/11/03	Focus Meeting for Sportsmen
3/12/03	Open House at Youth Lodge, Project Launch
3/17/03	Focus Meeting for Naturalists
3/17/03	Focus Meeting for Trail Users
3/18/03	Focus Meeting for Special Area Uses
4/09/03	PARAC – Presentation on Program Statement
4/21/03	Ecological and Cultural Charrette #1
5/14/03	PARAC – Presentation on Resource Analyses, Charrette #1
5/14/03	Open House, Resource Analyses, Charrette #1
5/29/03	Development Planning Charrette #2
6/25/03	PARAC – First Presentation of Concept Alternatives
6/25/03	Open House, First Presentation of Concept Alternatives
8/06/03	PARAC – Selection of Preferred Concept
10/23/03	Final Open House of the Draft Master Plan
11/12/03	Final PARAC meeting on the Draft Plan (scheduled)

Updates to Dakota County Board of Commissioners – Physical Development Committee of the Whole Updates

2/11/03	Presentation on the Spring Lake Park Planning Process
4/15/03	Written update on Program Statement
8/12/03	Presentation on Spring Lake Progress and Issues, PARAC's Recommendation

Other Public Communications

News Releases:	2/28/03, 5/06/03, 6/17/03, and Fall '03
(Articles or meeting notices ran in the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and suburban Papers)	
E-News Updates, ListServ Updates:	3/05/03, 5/06/03, 6/18/03, 7/25/03
County Update Articles:	Fall '02, Winter '03, Summer '03, and Fall '03
(Dakota County's newsletter, sent to all homes in Dakota County), items on Spring Lake ran in three consecutive issues.	
Parks Department Website:	Updated throughout process
Posters at Dakota County Fair:	Summer '02, Summer '03
Posters at Dakota County Libraries:	Winter '03, Summer '03, and Fall '03
(all or selected branches)	
Posters Placed in Park Kiosks:	Prior to Focus Meetings and Open Houses

Findings from the Public Process

In general, the findings from the public process validated the recreational trends forecasts presented in this section and underscored the importance of protecting the park's unique natural and cultural qualities. The initial public meetings were fruitful in defining how well the current park functions and how new uses can best be accommodated. The ecological, cultural, and planning charrettes involving many outside agencies were also very fruitful in developing the master plan. The results of each aspect of the public process are reflected in each section of the master plan. (Appendix A – Program Statement for Spring Lake Park provides additional background on the findings of the public process.) The forthcoming table provides an overview of the activities, amenities, and development features that came out of the public process.

Table notes:

- * **Demand** refers to the level of interest in certain activities or amenities as expressed by residents of Dakota County in county-wide survey and by those that attended the public meetings.
- ** **Quality** refers to the experiential value due to the innate characteristics of the landscape (e.g, walking along a railroad track is "low" quality relative to walking in a pristine natural area along a lakeshore, which is "high" quality).
- *** **Uniqueness** refers to the distinctiveness of certain park features relative to other regional-level parks due its innate qualities (e.g., sitting in a picnic shelter overlooking the river from the bluff is unique relative to a picnic shelter in an area without any distinguishing features).

Activities/Amenities/Development Features

Activity/Amenity/Feature	Demand*	Quality**	Uniqueness***	Comments
Hiking/nature trails	High	High	High	Natural landscape, the river and lake, and cultural history is unique and provides a great opportunity to expand the recreational and educational value of this type of trail.
Picnicking	High	High	High	Schaar's Bluff is already very popular with picnickers due to the setting, especially river views.
Multi-use facility	High	High	High	Unique setting creates an ideal opportunity for siting a multi-use facility that serves many purposes. Offers revenue generation potential as well.
Youth lodge/camp	High	High	High	Very successful development within the park. Potential to expand program opportunities to other groups, especially if year-round camping is provided near by.
Camping – unique	High	High	High	Opportunity to take advantage of unique opportunities associated with the river. Traditional RV-style camping was not thought to be desirable.
Water access – visual	High	High	High	Multiple opportunities for compelling views of the river and lake.
Water access – hunting and fishing	Moderate	Low	Mod.	Current launch is poorly sited (wind, debris). Poor location for canoes and kayaks to launch. Access drive also difficult to maintain.
Water access – water sports	High	Low	Mod.	Shallow lake, stump field, and poor water quality make this less desirable for water sports.
Formal outdoor education/naturalist studies	Low	High	High	Unique park attributes may increase interest in formal education programs – especially archaeology.
Informal nature study/birding	High	High	High	Unique park attributes provide extensive self-directed interpretive potential. Great birding opportunities.
Biking – paved trails	High	High	High	River access and views make this a great destination point for trail users.
Cross-country skiing	Low/Mod.	High	High	Unique qualities of the park could make this a destination winter venue if trails are expanded.
Snowshoeing	Low	High	High	
Skijorring	Low	High	High	
Hunting	Mod.	High	High	Relatively small group of sportsman use the area. Setting provides a high quality hunting opportunity.
Fishing	High	Low	Mod.	Fishing in Spring Lake is not highly regarded due to poor habitat and water quality. Rough fish are abundant.
Canoe/kayak	High	Mod./High	High	Current access (boat launch) is poorly sited for this use. Need more protection from wind.
Gardening	Mod.	High	High	Existing garden plots have been successful.
Off-leash dog area	Mod.	High	Mod.	Uncertain about compatibility with park vision.
Outdoor playground	Mod.	Mod.	Mod.	Best associated with picnic area. Too visible in current location.
Swimming	High	Low	Mod.	Poor water quality and lack of beach precludes this activity.
Archery trail	Low	High	High	One of only a few developed trails in regional park system.
Equestrian	Mod.	Mod.	Mod.	Soil erosion and conflicting uses are of concern. Also length of trail would be limited.
Model airplanes	Low	High	High	Not much in demand. Motorized use is incompatible with setting.

Conclusions

In consideration of the regional trends and findings of the public process, it is clear that Spring Lake Park Reserve is an essential component of the regional park system and will be vital to servicing the recreational and educational needs of residents within Dakota County and adjoining counties and cities.